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TAGS: [SENV](#) [ENRG](#) [EPET](#)  
SUBJECT: OIL SPILL OFF IVORY COAST

Classified By: Classified by DCM V.Valle for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. An oil spill off the coast of Ivoiriy Coast caused by the Canadian oil company CNR has largely been cleaned up. However, the Minister of Environment told the Ambassador he was unhappy with uncommunicativeness from CNR and alleged that Ivoirians close to the Presidency who are partners with CNR were working to block the investigation of the incident. The Minister added he may seek foreign assistance with the investigation and cleanup (the latter apparently now a moot point.). CNR is alleging that some in the government are exaggerating the incident to extract compensation from the company. End summary.

¶2. (U) During the night of 28- 29 March, Canadian Natural Resources (CNR) a Canadian oil company operating offshore here generated an oil spill after it released, through human or technical error, waste water contaminated with oil from a drilling boat near the oil rig of Al Baraka, off the shore of Jacquesville, some 100 kilometers from Abidjan. Although the amount of petroleum that was released was not large, the spill spread over the next several days and reached shore at a point near Jacquesville. CNR representatives maintain that they signed a contract with Hampton, a UK-based company, to clean up the spill as soon as the spill was discovered. CNR claims that, except for a slick that reached the beach, the spill had been cleaned up by March 31.

¶3. (C) In response to the spill, the Ivoirian government set up an interagency committee composed of representatives from CIAPOL (the Ivorian crisis response unit) and the Ministries of Environment, Transport, Energy and Mines, and Fishing. The Minister of the Environment and the head of CIAPOL met with the Ambassador on April 1 to indicate that the Ivoirian government may seek assistance for investigation of the spill and for the cleanup operation. (The Minister also called on the French and Canadian Ambassadors.) The Minister lacked information about what had happened and complained that the Canadian company had not reported the spill to the government on a timely basis nor had it been forthcoming with information. The Minister also maintained that the CNR had not used an approved method for combatting the spill. The Minister added that Ivoirians close to the Presidency were working with CNR and suggested that these Ivoirians were trying to block a full investigation into what had occurred and influence how it was addressed.

¶4. (SBU) The Canadian DCM told us that he and the Minister of the Environment and CNR officials had overflowed the area of the spill on April 2 and he could confirm that there was no longer any oil in the water. The Canadian DCM also admitted that CNR had initially not been as communicative as it should have been with the government. He attributed that to the absence of the company's Director General, who had been in Gabon. Whatever the mistakes in communication, he averred that CNR is a serious company and that it had behaved responsibly in combating the spill. The Canadian DCM also suggested that some in the government (not the environment

minister but perhaps, he suggested, the head of CIAPOL) could be trying to exaggerate the incident in order to make the company pay compensation.

15. (SBU) CNR officials also told us they believe that the press was exaggerating the breadth of the spill and that the Ivoirian government was misrepresenting the efforts of CNR to address the issue in order to extract compensation for environmental damage. (Already, fishermen who were ordered by the government to refrain from fishing in the affected area have asked the government for compensation for their losses.) CNR insisted that the chemical used to clean the spill by making the oil sink was environmentally benign and that there will be no permanent impact on the local marine ecosystem as a result of the spill or the clean-up methodology. CNR will issue a report within the next few days on the clean-up response and its environmental impact.

16. (C) Comment: The Minister of Environment,s allegations about Presidential insiders covering up an inquiry into the spill and the countercharges that government officials are trying to extort from CNR are a reminder of Cote d,Ivoire,s tortuous politics. Apparently, even an oil spill here cannot be handled in a straightforward or transparent manner.  
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